

Alive or Dead, I Don't Want Her!
Kanavera Jātaka
Script for Radio Play

Narrator 01: It was while staying at Jetavana that the Buddha told this story about a bhikkhu who was tempted by his former wife.

A young man from a good family in Sāvattihī had left his wife and children to become a bhikkhu. There were so many bhikkhus who were senior to him that he was always at the end of the line. By the time his turn came, all the delicious food had been served. He usually received no more than rice gruel with broken lumps of rice, stale chapatis, or rotting vegetables. Even that was tossed at him hastily, and he had to sit with the sāmaneras. Unable to survive on this fare, he took what he had gotten and went to his old house, where he was greeted by his ex-wife.

Wife: Oh, Venerable Sir, you should not have to eat stale food like this. Let me take your bowl. I will empty it and serve you some of my delicious curries instead. Here you are, Venerable Sir. Please enjoy your meal. Excuse me. I must go to the back of the house.

Bhikkhu: Of course, Madam. *(Pause)* This food is so delicious that I do not want to leave here. I almost wish I could stay and enjoy food like this every day.

Wife: Well, Venerable Sir, I hope you have enjoyed your meal.

Bhikkhu: Yes, Madam. I have.

*Bhavatu sabba magalam rakkhantu sabba devata,
Sabba buddha nubhavana,
Sabba dhamma nubhavana,
Sabba sangha nubhavana
Sada sotthi bhavantu te.*

Wife: Good-by, Venerable Sir. Please come again. *(Pause)*

I can see that he is tempted by my delicious food. Perhaps I can get him to come back to me. Let me test him. Girl!

Servant: Yes, Madam.

Wife: I want you to invite some of my friends in this village for lunch tomorrow. Also, arrange for a bullock cart to be brought to the house and have it waiting by the front door.

Narrator 02: The next day . . .

Servant: Madam, your guests are arriving, and the bullock cart is ready..

Wife: Good. Show my friends into the main room and let them begin eating. I will stay here in my chamber for a bit.

Servant: Yes, Madam.

Please come in and eat. Madam will be with you shortly.

Guest 1: Thank you.

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Guest 2: Oh, what lovely food!

Guest 3: How gracious!

(Sounds of eating, laughter, and enjoyment)

Guest 1: There's a bhikkhu at the door!

Wife: Greet him kindly, and ask him to pass on!

Guest 2: We are sorry, Venerable Sir, but there is no food for you today.

(Pause)

Guest 3: He's still here! He won't leave!

Wife: Let me see who it is. Oh, it is the father of my children! Venerable Sir, let me take your bowl and give you some of this delicious food.

(Pause)

Bhikkhu: *Bhavatu sabba magalam rakkhantu sabba devata,
Sabba buddha nubhavana,
Sabba dhamma nubhavana,
Sabba sangha nubhavana
Sada sotthi bhavantu te.*

Wife: Sir, you are now a well-disciplined bhikkhu. We have been living here since you left, but there is no proper household without a master, so we have decided to leave and to return to the country. Be steadfast in your practice. Please forgive us if we have done anything wrong by you.

Bhikkhu: No! Say it isn't so! Oh, dear! What am I going to do? Oh, dear! Please don't go! I cannot live without you! I don't want to be a bhikkhu anymore. I'll take back my robe and bowl today. I'll come back and live with you! Please!

Wife: Oh, thank you! I knew you loved me still. Yes, please come home to me and the children. We will be so happy together again!

Bhikkhu: Yes. Please wait a little. I must go to Jetavana to give up my bowl and robe.

Wife: Of course, darling. Please hurry back!

(Pause)

Bhikkhu: My friends, I am afraid that I must leave Jetavana.

Bhikkhu 2: What? You are going to disrobe?

Bhikkhu: Yes. I just came from my old house and . . .

Bhikkhu 3: Do you mean that you no longer want to be a bhikkhu because of your former wife?

Bhikkhu 2: I don't believe it!

Bhikkhu 3: Come. We must see the Buddha at once.

Bhikkhu 2: Venerable Sir, this bhikkhu says that he wants to leave the Order.

The Buddha: Is it true, Brother, that you are ready to give up the holy life?

Bhikkhu: Yes, Venerable Sir, it is true.

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The Buddha: What has caused you to feel this way?

Bhikkhu: I have met my former wife, and my passion for her has been rekindled.

The Buddha: Brother! That woman is an evil threat to you. In former times, she was also a source of great danger for you. Once, because of her, you even had your head cut off. Let me tell you a story of the past.

Narrator 03: Long, long ago, when Brahmadata was reigning in Bārānasi, the Bodhisatta was born in a village of Kāsi, and his parents visited an astrologer who cast his horoscope.

Astrologer: This baby is destined to become a thief!

Narrator 04: Years passed, and the boy grew up to be a strong young man.

Mother: Oh, dear! What the astrologer said was true. Our son has become a thief.

Father: Yes, and he is a very good one. I've heard that he has broken into a lot of houses.

Mother: My dear, it is terrible! He targets the houses of wealthy merchants and has made off with great fortunes. I wonder where he is hiding out.

Father: All I know is that he is notorious for his daring and his great strength, and it seems that no one can catch him.

Mother: I've heard that so many people have complained to the king that he has ordered the governor to arrest him without fail. The governor has offered a sizable reward for his capture and stationed soldiers in all the likely places. I'm so worried!

Narrator 05: At last, the thief made a mistake, fell into a trap, and was caught red-handed.

Governor: Well, young man, at last your career has come to an end. Everyone knows who you are and what you have done. There is no need for a trial.

Guards! Bind his arms tightly behind his back, hang a wreath of red kanavera flowers around his neck, sprinkle brick dust on his head, march him to the southern gate of the city, and cut off his head!

Citizens: Hooray!

(Sound of a drum)

Narrator 06: At every crossroads, the procession stopped, and he was beaten with whips. All along the way, townsfolk gathered to watch. Everyone was relieved and overjoyed that the thief who had plagued the city had been captured at last.

As the procession passed the palace, a famous courtesan named Samā, happened to lean out of an open window on the upper floor.

Samā: Look at that man! He is so handsome! Even in fetters, he stands head and shoulders above his guards. I love him! How can I get him released? I wonder what I can do?

Narrator 07: Samā was the most successful courtesan in Bārānasi. She counted among her clients all the important men of the city, including the king. Her favors were so sought after that she regularly received one thousand coins for a single night.

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Samā: Girl! Come here!

Servant: Yes, madam.

Samā: Here are one thousand coins. Go to the governor, and tell him that the thief who is being executed is Samā's dearly beloved brother. Give him the money, and ask him, as a favor to Samā, to allow his prisoner to escape.

Servant: Yes, madam.

(Pause)

Servant: Your Excellency, the thief who is being executed is Samā's dearly beloved brother. My mistress asks that, as a favor to her, you please allow your prisoner to escape.

Governor: Oh, dear. This is a notorious criminal. I cannot simply let him go free, but, if I had another man as a substitute, I could put the thief in a covered carriage and send him to Samā.

Servant: Thank you, Your Excellency. Good day.

(Pause)

Samā: My dear, I am glad you came back so quickly. What did the governor say?

Servant: He said that, because the thief was so well-known, he could not simply let him go free, but, if he had another man to execute in his place, he could put the thief in a covered carriage and send him to you.

Samā: Oh, that is very interesting. I wonder who could replace him.

(A knock at the door)

Samā: Someone is here. See who it is.

Servant: Madam, it is the rich young merchant, who visits you almost everyday. I'm sure he is quite enamored of you.

Samā: Wonderful! Give me a moment to compose myself and then show him in.

Servant: Yes, madam.

Merchant: Darling Samā. I have missed you so much! *(Hands her a bag of money)*

Samā: *(Sits down and begins weeping)* Oh, dear!

Merchant: My dear Samā, what is the matter? Why do you weep?

Samā: My Lord, the thief who was just captured is my brother. He never visited me, because people told him that I follow a low trade, but I love him dearly. I appealed to the governor, and he volunteered to let my brother go free if I gave him one thousand coins. Now I have the money, but I can't find anyone to take it to the governor for me.

Merchant: Darling Samā, you know how much I care for you! I would do anything for you. Please let me deliver the money. I can take it and hurry right back.

Samā: Oh, that is so sweet! I would be so happy if you took this money to the governor!

Merchant: Of course, darling. I won't be a minute. Just wait for me!

(Pause) Quick! I must see the governor.

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- Doorman: This way, sir.
Your Excellency. A young man is here to see you.
- Governor: Come in, sir. What can I do for you?
- Merchant: Your excellency. I have come from Samā She would like to offer you this one thousand coins in return for. . .
- Governor: Guards! Seize him!
- Merchant: Wait! Samā wants . . .
- Governor: I know what Samā wants, and she is very kind to send me this second bag of money. And you are a fool for bringing it to me.
Guards! Take off his clothes and bring the thief!
- Merchant: What do you mean? What are you doing. No! Stop!
- Narrator 08: After having the two men exchange clothes, the governor sent the thief as he had promised to Samā and hid the merchant in a secret cell.
- Governor: Everyone knows what the thief looks like, so I can't send this young man out now. I'll have to figure out how to put him to death after it gets dark.
Guards! Please announce that the execution will be unavoidably delayed.
- Narrator 09: Finally, everyone gave up waiting and returned home. At midnight, with only a few torches lighting the execution site, the governor had the young merchant beheaded. The next morning, the populace found the body exposed as a warning.
- Citizen 1: Look! The thief was executed last night!
- Citizen 2: At last, we are safe!
- Citizen 1: It's too bad we couldn't have witnessed the execution!
- Citizen 2: You children had better behave, or this is what will happen to you!
- Narrator 10: From that day, Samā refused offers from other men and spent all of her time with the thief. She lavished her affection on him and pampered him with every luxury, but she never let him out of her sight.
- Thief: This woman is dangerous. She says she loves me, but I am in a very precarious position. I know that I can't trust her. If she falls in love with someone else, she will betray me just like she did that other fellow. She would have me killed without a second thought. My only hope is to escape. I had better begin thinking about how I can get away. First, I'll secretly collect some of her jewels so that I don't leave empty-handed. *(Pause)*
My dear, since I arrived here, we have stayed indoors like cockatoos in a cage. Let's go outside and enjoy ourselves in the garden.
- Samā: That's a wonderful idea! Girl! Prepare a picnic lunch with plenty of delicious dishes. Now, Darling, just wait a few minutes. Let me get dressed and put on my jewels. I'll be ready very quickly. Oh, how exciting! Tell the servant to get the closed carriage ready. I know just the secluded garden where we can go and play.

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Narrator 11: In the garden, they spent several happy hours chasing each other and lolling on the grass. Suddenly the thief grabbed Samā and pulled her into a thicket of kanavera bushes.

Thief: Come here, Darling, and give me a kiss.

Samā: Darling! Don't hold me so tight.

Thief: The tighter the better!

Samā: No! I can't breathe! (*Gasps*)

Thief: That's too bad, isn't it?

Samā: (*Faintly*) Help! Ah-h-h-h-!

Thief: I think she'll never wake up. Let me take all her jewels and put them in the bag with the rest. Now I'm off! Good-bye, Samā. Good riddance, you faithless wretch!

Narrator 12: As agile as a fleeing deer, he leapt over the wall and disappeared.
Some time later . . .

Samā: Oh! Where am I? What happened? Where is my husband? Help!

Servant: Yes, Madam, what is it?

Samā: What has become of your master? Where did he go?

Servant: We do not know, madam. We haven't seen the young lord.

Samā: Oh, dear! He must have thought me dead and, in his panic, run away! Of course, he took my jewels because he didn't have any money of his own. Oh, my poor darling! I will not lie on my soft couch, and I will live in mourning until I have set eyes on you again! Please come back soon!

Narrator 13: True to her word, she gave up her bed and began sleeping on the floor. She wore only rough clothing; stopped using perfumes, lotions, and cosmetics; and limited herself to only one meal a day.

Determined to find her lover and to bring him back, Samā sent for a troop of actors.

Actor 1: What can we do for you, Madam?

Samā: Here are one thousand coins. Take your performance everywhere, to every village, town, and city. Everywhere you go, to every crowd, sing this song:

'It was the joyous springtime,

With trees and shrubs brightly flowering.

From her swoon, Samā has awakened.

Now Samā lives, and Samā lives for you alone!'

If my husband is in the crowd, he will hear this song, and he will speak to you.

When you meet him, tell him I am well, and ask him to come back with you. If you bring him back, I will give you a rich reward. If he refuses, then bring me back his message.

Here is more money to cover you expenses. Off you go!

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Narrator 14: From Bārānasi, the actors traveled throughout Kāsi. They performed in even the smallest village and hamlet. At last, they reached the border and set up their stage in a remote village of thieves. As they had done with every performance, they concluded by singing,

Actor 1: 'It was the joyous springtime,

Actor 2: With trees and shrubs brightly flowering.

Actor 1: From her swoon, Samā has awakened.

Actor 2: Now Samā lives, and Samā lives for you alone!'

Thief: You say that Samā is alive, but I do not believe it. The dead do not come back to life!

Actor 1: Samā is not dead. Nor was she ever so.

Actor 2: She told us to tell you that she has not allowed any man to take your place. Waiting for you, she lives in mourning.

Actor 1: She sleeps on the floor and wears rough clothing. She no longer uses any make-up, and she takes only one meal a day.

Actor 2: She swears, sir, that she loves you and you alone!

Thief: Whether she is alive or dead, I don't want her! Samā is fickle and has a roving eye. She once cast off a faithful man, and she would have betrayed me, too, if I hadn't fled!

Narrator 15: The actors immediately returned to Bārānasi and reported to Samā exactly what the thief had said.

Samā: (*weeps*)

Narrator 16: All hope gone, she regretfully resumed her old way of life.

Narrator 17: Having concluded his story, the Buddha taught the Dhamma, and the backsliding bhikkhu attained the first path. Then the Buddha identified the birth:

The Buddha: At that time, this bhikkhu was the rich young merchant, his former wife was Samā, and I was the thief.